

ON THE TOPOGRAPHY OF THE PRODUCTION  
STRUCTURES IN THE CAPITAL CENTERS OF THE FIRST BULGARIAN  
KINGDOM

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One of the major topics in the contemporary studies of the Middle Ages has always been and still is the problem of the development of the medieval town. In the middle of the XX century a new, particular branch appeared in the general studies of the Middle Ages – the study of urbanization; that sets the beginning of a new tendency in studying the town, mainly as a historic and economic phenomenon. In that respect, the interest focused on the town structures of medieval Bulgaria is hardly arbitrary. Almost all main problems in the Bulgarian history are connected with the town: the whole administrative and clerical life in the country was concentrated in the towns; the problems concerning the fortified buildings, the army organization, the making of armaments were closely connected with the town; the cultural and political life of the country; the development of trade and crafts, were also unbreakable part of the town life.

A major part in the urban structure of the first capital centers of the Bulgarian Kingdom takes the spatial localization of the production structures, which are part of the conceptual model of the early-medieval Bulgarian town. As a town and production structure, the territorial-spatial characteristics of the town, have a certain influence on all spheres of its foundation and development. Thus, the problems connected with the architectural structure in the urban settlements, the status of the citizens and the organization of the economic and production work in the Bulgarian early-medieval capitals, have many times been discussed and still take up a central place in the present scientific research discussions. In that aspect, the history of the Bulgarian early-medieval town with its topographic and social-economic characteristics has driven the attention of the researchers, and especially the attention of the archeologists in the recent years. On that level of studying and research work, however, there is a certain lack of thorough general studies on questions that concern not only the structuring of the occupied town space, but also the spatial localization of the production and economic structures of the Bulgarian medieval town.

The aim of the present announcement is to follow and discuss the spatial localization and the chronology of the production structures on the basis of the archeological data, as they were once part of the urban building and construction of the first capitals Pliska and Preslav.

Using the data from the archeological research work, as a main source of information in studying the problems of the Bulgarian medieval town, was

grounded in the 60s of the XX century<sup>1</sup>. Some interesting attempts were made indeed in recent years so that the results on the history of the Bulgarian town and all its forms be summarized. Though, considering the importance of that problem some research works, based on different materials, at present have a rather common nature<sup>2</sup> (due to the gained facts and materials).

The interest in the spatial structure of the first capitals of the Bulgarian Kingdom, Pliska and Veliki Preslav, which are the most significant town centers in all Middle Ages at all, is based on the circumstance that during all that period these towns were main centers of the administrative, political, economical and cultural life. The localization of the production centers in both capital towns of the Bulgarian state and in the nearby surroundings, could be viewed in two different dimensions – geographic and topographic, that is with respect to their place in the local settlement systems.

The geographical localization of the production centers is determined by certain circumstances, and basically: the main ore deposits of the raw materials /iron-ore deposits, clay and stone quarries, woods and others/, the markets, the position of the road system, the presence of constant water resources, the workers and other elements connected with the production and realization of the ready production. In that respect, the first two capital centers of the Bulgarian state took the lead. That is so because these two towns have been extensively researched.

Since ancient times our lands had been famous for their ore deposits and exploitation. The mine exploitation did not stop its progress even in the Middle Ages. In VIII-X century a number of regions were integrated within the borders of the First Bulgarian Kingdom, which had rich ore-deposits earlier exploited by

<sup>1</sup> Angelov, D. *Kum vaprosa za srednovekovnija bulgarski grad.* - Archeology, II, book 3, 1960.

<sup>2</sup> Kr. Miyatev. Славянской город в древней Болгарии. - Byzantinoslavica, 10, 1949, N 2; V. Tupkova-Zaimova. Kreposti i ukrepeni gradove prez Parvoto bulgarsko tsarstvo. - VISb. 1956, book 3, pp.40-60; S. Géorgieva. Études archéologiques des cites du Bas moyen âge en Bulgarie. - Actes du Premier congrès international des études balkaniques sud-est européennes, II, S., 1969, pp. 625-642; Lishev, Str. Bulgarskijat srednovekoven grad. S., 1970; *Srednovekovnijat grad*. S. 1981; Polivjanin, D. I. Srednovekovnijat bulgarski grad prez XIII-XIV century. S., 1989; Ovcharov, D. Arheologicheski aspekti na srednovekovnata bulgarska durzhava. - VIZb. XI, 2, 1973, pp. 65-68; Changova, Y. *Kum vaprosa za ustrojstvoto na srednovekovnija bulgarski grad /IX-XIV c./* - In: The Architecture of the First and Second Bulgarian State. S., 1975, p. 79 and next. The same author. Bulgarskijat srednovekoven grad i gradovete v Yugoiztochna Europa. - In: Bulgaria in the world from ancient times to present days. P. I, S., 1979, pp.233-238.; Angelov, N. Srednovekovnijat grad Turnovo spored izvorite ot XII-XIV century i dosegashnite razkopki. - IOMVT, II, 1964, p. 4 and next.; Georgieva, S. Srednovekovnijat grad Cherven. Problemi i prouchvanija. - IAI, XXXIII, 1972, p.306 and next; Georgieva, S. - V. Dimova. Zamakut v srednovekovnijat grad Cherven. - IAI, XXX, 1967, p.5 and; Koledarov, P. *Kum vaprosa za razvitiето na selishtnata mrezhа i na nejnite elementi v srednashnata i iztochnata chast na Balkanskija poluostruv ot VII century to XVIII century* - III, 18, 1967. Ovcharov, D. Kontinuitet i priemstvenost v bulgarskata rannosrednovekovna kultura. - In: Seminarium Tracicum.I.S., 1985,19-27.

the Thracians<sup>3</sup>. The Balkan raw material province was famous for its deposits of gold, copper, lead, zinc and iron<sup>4</sup>. Such deposits were situated in Stara planina, The Rodopes, Rila and some mountains in Macedonia. The raw-material production, in different ways, in the form of ore or semi-manufactured goods, clay, animal or vegetal production had reached the main centers of craft trade in VII-X century. According to the archeological data from Pliska and Preslav various crafts had been practiced: blacksmith's trade, goldsmith's trade, coppersmith's trade, stone-cutting trade, masonry, pottery-making trade, brick-making trade, bone-processing, glass-making trade, carpentry trade, leather-working trade, weaving trade, tailoring trade, jewellery-making trade and some others<sup>5</sup>. There is some kind of specificity in their development and mainly in their spreading: the territorial position was often determined not by the closeness to the raw material sources but by the conditions of the production work – the presence of the needed workshops and structures in the given region which had their priorities in manipulation of the raw material and the ready-to-use products; the presence of qualified workers. Probably the sale conditions of the ready production were of great importance.

In a situation of domination of small-ware market and weak commodity-money relations, the sale of the ready production determined the existence of a certain kind of production. That's the reason why the most developed metal-working centers in Pliska and Preslav were settled far from the raw-material sources /Stara planina and the Karpathians/. It was the same situation in the most highly-developed regions of textile trade, Tuskan and Flandria, which relied basically on the transport wave, and the highly developed metallurgic centers were situated far from the raw material sources (Paris).

The general state of the engineering infrastructure was of great importance for the geographical and topographical spreading of the crafts – the presence and the good repair of the roads, bridges, water catchment, water canals. The main continental trade roads cross the eastern part of Balkan peninsula – from the Baltic to Constantinople and Asia, from Caucasus to Adriatic and from Central and Western Europe through the Straits to the Near East and Lesser Asia. Three roads of great importance cross Dobrudja region: Krajdunavski (along the river Danube), Krajmorski (along the seaside) and Noviodunum-Marcianopolis-Deultum<sup>6</sup>. The foundation of the state centers in Pliska field changes the purpose

<sup>3</sup> Konjarov, G. Prinos kum istorijata na rudarstvoto i metalurgijata v Bulgaira. S., 1953; **The same author.** Imalo li e zheleznuvi rudi i zhelezodobiv prez srednite vekove v Severoiztochna Bulgaira. – Nature, 1958, pp. 79-84. Mamzer, H. Studia nad metalurgia zelaza na terenie Pólnocno-wschodniej bułgarii we wczesnym Sredniowieczu. Wydawnictwo Polskiej akademii nauk 1988, 204 s.

<sup>4</sup> Yovchev, Y. Polezni izkopaemi na NRB. S. 1963.

<sup>5</sup> Vitlyanov, St. Zanajati i proizvodstva v Pliska i Preslav prez IX-X century. – In: Collection of presentations in honour of 65-anniversary of prof. doctor of arts Dimitar Ignatovski. Shumen 2005, pp. 24-32

<sup>6</sup> Shkorpil, K. Некоторые из дорог Восточной Болгарии. – In: Aboba-Pliska, IRAIK, 1905, 443-502; Velkov, V. Gradat v Trakija i Dakija prez kasnata antichnost IV-VI century. S., 1959, 168-

and destination of the old Roman roads. Some of these roads turn from main to roads of secondary importance and vice versa. Some others gradually lose their economic and trade status. The main road which connects the Danube and the regions in the south through Pliska with the coastal line in the area of Odesos-Varna has a great influence over the economical development of the capital centers of the Bulgarian state. An important place in that transport corridor takes the famous "Great Northern road" from IX century, which was known as "Из варяг в греки"- "Iz varjag v greki". It started from the coasts of the Baltic Sea, went along the River Neva and the Lake Ladoj, the river Volohova, the lake Ilmen, the river Lovata, downstream the river Dnepar and reached the Black sea. People travelling at sea reached the Byzantine capital and most probably the Bulgarian ports.

There are interesting facts about the trade business between Russia in the region of Kiev and Byzantine empire in the first half of X century in the literary work "Za upravljenieto na imperijata" (De administrando imperio) of the Byzantine writer Konstantin Bagrenorodni<sup>7</sup>. That gives evidence that the merchants from Kiev had to cross Bulgarian lands on their way to Tsarigrad. In that case, undoubtedly, the merchants from Kiev stopped for a while in the settlements situated along the coastline of the Black Sea, and made contacts with the local people or with the merchants from Pliska and Veliki Preslav, exchanging goods.

The most specific physic-geographic characteristic which had a strong effect on the construction and development of the production centers in the regions of the capitals of the First Bulgarian Kingdom was their natural fortification. The Danube, The Black Sea and Stara Planina acted like natural barriers and protected the territorial core of the state and its capitals in moments of crisis. That guaranteed the economical development and prosperity of the capitals<sup>8</sup>. Along with the old town centers with the course of time, new towns had been founded which became part of the economic life of the Bulgarian state. There were eighty towns<sup>9</sup> only in the downstream area of the Danube according to an announcement from "Повесть временных лет". Among them as an important center in IX-X century was the town of Preslavets (Little Preslavets), which took an essential part in the transit trade of the capitals of Pliska and Veliki Preslav.

The extremely favorable and diverse natural and weather conditions undoubtedly furthered the quick and effective adaptation of the Slavs and ProtoBulgarians to the environment in the region of Bulgaria of the Danube (North Bulgaria). The two ethnos settled separately and that resulted in

170; Vulpe, R. Din istoria Dobrodegi. Bucuresti. 1968, II; Torbatov, S. Ukrepitelnata sistema v provincija Skitija (at the end of III-VII century). S., 2002, p.72 and next.

<sup>7</sup> Constantine Porphyrogenitus de administrando imperio. Ed. G.Moravcsik-R. Jenkins. Budapest, 1948, III, 9, p.62.

<sup>8</sup> Rashev, R.. Starobulgarski ukreplenija na Dolnija Dunav /VII-XI century/. Varna, 1982, p.235.

<sup>9</sup> Повесть временных лет. I, М., 1950, p. 47.

establishing town structures and organization and development of a production process in the early medieval Bulgarian state. In other words there were preconditions for the laying of the foundations of the social-economic structure and organization of the Bulgarian state.

The great potential of the natural resources within the boundaries of the First Bulgarian Kingdom, provided the production centers in Pliska and Veliki Preslav with the needed raw-materials. That did not only further the development of the craft production trade, but predetermined the high demographic capacity and mobility in the capital centers. A compact net of stationary settlements, production and trade structures were gradually formed and developed around the capital towns from the end of VIII to the beginning of the XI century. There are still many archeological traces to announce that fact. But the importance should be focused on the settlement landscape, that is the settlements themselves, where the very relationships among the people concentrated – social status, trade and production contacts and others. By its character, the town systems like Pliska and Veliki Preslav undoubtedly interacted with the agrarian forms of living; that becomes obvious from the numerous farming implements found during the archeological excavations<sup>10</sup>. Agriculture, along with the crafts, was an important, if not a main occupation in the economical life of the Bulgarian capitals. That circumstance had a certain effect on the town-demographic model of the capital centers.

In spatial-architectural aspect, the production complexes /quarters/ were almost always situated outside the living quarters, that is in the "External town". The "External town", by its nature, was a center of economical life. The ordinary people lived there; the fields, gardens and the various workshops were concentrated in the External town. It was obligatory that all hazardous crafts and working processes connected with high temperature and risk of pollution and fire be situated outside the town walls. Spatially, the sacred buildings had the domineering part in the External town. The impressive clerical buildings, the domes and the monasteries most of which were centers of craft trade, were also situated there; the open markets where the peasants from the nearby villages gathered. The developing crafts and various trades turned Pliska and Veliki Preslav into main trading towns contrary to the villages.

Along with other town settlements in the First Bulgarian Kingdom Pliska and Veliki Preslav were given the name "poleis"<sup>11</sup> that is, they came as a product of a more developed economical kind of life with strong division of labor. Though the two capitals had different degree of urbanization they were indeed a unique agglomeration of productive people (mainly farmers and craftsmen) and

<sup>10</sup> Henning, J. Südosteuropa zwischen Antike und Mittelalter. – Schriften zur Frühgeschichte. 42. Berlin, 1987.

<sup>11</sup> Za terminologijata na vizantijskite izvor pri oznachavane na selishtata ot gradski tip v srednovekovna Bulgaria, com. Tupkova-Zaimova, V., In: Strongholds and fortified towns in the First Bulgarian Kingdom. VIS, XXV, 1956, 3, p.40.

people who were not engaged in agricultural and handicraft work (boyars, soldiers, clerks, clergymen). Gradually that agglomeration that came as a result of economic, demographic and social-political processes, turned in the following centuries a number of settlements into important town centers with a considerable number of people at the time.

A series of factors of different character had some effect on the production architecture and area planning, for example: the type of production, the nature of the products, the sources and the type of the raw material, the general state of the energy resources and other elements connected with the organization and realization of the production processes.

An essential point for the spatial localization of the production structures is their architectural aspect – the plan, size and the construction, the type, number and parameters of the economic buildings and structures. The available research data about the production architecture in Bulgaria in the early Middle Ages are still limited and a detailed analysis is hard to carry out. The smallest production forms are the already settled workshops. They are the smallest production units with permanent servicing and maintaining substructure. Most frequently these production units, spatially and functionally, were a separate part of a town form, part of the household of the particular citizen, respectively. That issue corresponds directly to the structure of the town forms. The combination of several similar units was the beginning of the production center of each settlement or production quarter. Indeed, that smallest production form of the town structure was part of the village or bigger town structure.

The production quarters, along with the grand building of ground defense ramparts, stone fortifying systems, churches and monasteries, changed to a certain extent the general outlook of the “internal” and “external town” of the capital centers, as the whole construction of the infrastructure of Pliska and Veliki Preslav. That progress in building in both capitals as well as the need of new production relations in IX-X century, strongly influenced on the economic specialization, the territorial topography of the building economic systems, and last but not least the professional deeds of the people in the capital. The topographic analysis of the settlements near the capitals shows that the public works and the production activities, the hydrosystems, the road communications and other elements of the urbanization caused a strong effect not only on the economic specialization and nature of the production activities of the inhabitants, but also on the special-typical grouping of the craft structures. For example all types of production work which needed water and water energy were situated near water sources or water basins. A good example in that respect is the region of the present dryland Asar dere which occupies the western half of the so called External town of Pliska. Due the presence of natural water in that region part of the living buildings and production quarters of the capital were established there. Other part of the production work was concentrated near the roads that crossed the border regions on the territory of the town. In general, the available information from the archeological research work concerns mainly a later period

of the existence of the town – IX-XI century. The geophysical research carried out in the region of Asar dere in the years after 1996 undoubtedly testify to an earlier period of life dated back from VIII – the beginning of the IX century<sup>12</sup>. These are mainly mounds of remnants from the production work – burned timber mixed with great amount of ceramic objects. The grey ceramics was typical for the production process – ceramic objects with polished edges, ceramic objects with engraved decoration, and some fragments of ceramic objects made of red and brown painted yellow ceramics, typical for the lands south of the Danube. The local people lived in dug buildings with walls constructed of stones and clay cement. The houses were piled with waste products, consisted mainly fragment iron objects and processed colour metals. The craft objects found in that period testify to a certain kind of production work that required high-qualified specialization for the making of glass objects and window pane. We must also mention the workshops that specialized in making fine blacksmith objects and color metal decorations. There are some working tools which confirm that fact: the clay pots for founding and melting-pots for processing bronze as well as some traces of semi-manufactured goods and production waste of colour metal. Probably in the craftsmen's quarter near Asar dere ordinary kitchen and polished cooking ceramic works were made. Undoubtedly, in VIII-IX century there were many craftsmen's quarters along Asar dere with highly-specialized production work.

Later this highly-specialized production work decentralized, that probably came as a result of the needs of the ruler and the court center. Outside the walls of the Internal town there was a glass workshop with many melting stoves dated back to IX-X century<sup>13</sup>. The ceramic workshop for pottery firing dated back to the same time. It was placed under a shed set against the west wall of the fortress<sup>14</sup>.

There were other workshops for making metal objects situated along the fortified walls<sup>15</sup> and other places in the Internal town of Pliska<sup>16</sup>.

The production center situated in Asar dere was covered with thick layers of earth, one meter in thickness that came as a result of the erosion and the agricultural work in the External town of Pliska. In X-XI century on the

<sup>12</sup> The geological research work was carried out by a Bulgarian-German archeological expedition in the years after 1996. The results are not published.

<sup>13</sup> **Doncheva-Petkova, L., Zh. Zlatinova**, Stuklarska rabotilnitsa kraj zapadnata krepostna stena v Pliska. – *Archology*, XX, 1978, 4, pp.37-48. **Balabanov, T.** Za nachaloto na stakloobrabotvaneto i stakloproizvodstvoto v Srednevekovna Bulgaria. – In: Preslav, p.3, V. 1983, pp.228-240.

<sup>14</sup> **Antonova, V. and St. Vitlyanov**. Pliska. Zapadna krepostna stena – sektor sever. – In: Pliska. Preslav, 4, S., 1985, pp.63-64.

<sup>15</sup> **Balabanov, T.** Zhelezarska i mednikarska rabotilnitsa v Pliska. – MPK, 1981, 4, pp.34-39; **Antonova, V., St. Vitlyanov**. Cited literature p. 64; **Doncheva-Petkova, L.** Za metalodobiva i metaloobrabotvaneto v Pliska. – *Archeology*, 1980, 4, pp. 27-36.

<sup>16</sup> **Vitlyanov, St.** Danni za obrabotka na zhelezazo v tsentrovete na Parvoto bulgarski tsarstvo. – In: The medieval Bulgarian town. S., 1980, p. 140 and next.

completely transformed area many dug in houses were placed, mainly abodes of people who were engaged in agricultural work. Some researchers consider that in that late period of the development of Pliska, the big earth rampart was made which aim was to protect the people living in the region and at the same time to secure peace in the numerous mansions.

It is the same situation with the second capital center of the First Bulgarian Kingdom Veliki Preslav. The archeological research work presents, in general, the outlines of the topography of the production constructions that were connected with the various craft works in the town and the surroundings. The main production structures in IX-X century were concentrated on the either banks of Rumska reka and along the river Ticha<sup>17</sup>. There are archeological data in other places in Veliki Preslav which give evidence for production constructions connected with different kinds of production work in IX-X century. There are profound research data announcing the development of craft trade in the monasteries around Preslav. In that respect it is worth mentioning the problem concerning the territorial localization of the monasteries around Preslav. Some of them were established beyond the boundaries of the town, some others were situated in the town itself. The monasteries outside the town are: "Saint Pantelimon", the monastery in the region of Pod Vulkashina, Avradaka, Tuzlaluka. In the town itself: the monastery in the region of Chereshto, in the "Selishte" quarter and around "Kruglata tsarkva".

The different topographic approach in the building of the monasteries in Veliki Preslav was determined not by the nature of the monastery collective farm work, but mostly by their effect on the medieval Bulgarian society. On one hand it was the ideal for living an ascetic kind of life that led to the building of monasteries outside the towns and villages so that the monks and nuns could have the freedom to pray in peace and seclusion, far from the laity. On the other hand there were monasteries in the town center itself for a stronger effect on the believers. The archeological research data on some monasteries record that they were not only places for prayers and literary work, but also centers of different craft trades and basically centers of artistically-made ceramic works and painted icons. An important part in the production work in the monasteries takes a number of other production activities. Undoubtedly, the monastery clergy ran the various production metal works. Most probably in the discovered jewellery workshops, the monks-craftsmen made small metal objects and ornaments as a souvenir from the monastery. There were more data on that topic in the monasteries in Patlejna, Tuzlaluka, Pod Zabuie and some others. Obviously as in the other medieval monasteries the greater part of the craft trade was concentrated in the hands of the monks. That is a great moment which develops to a great extent our knowledge and concepts of the role of the medieval

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<sup>17</sup> Vuzharova, Zh. Zhelezarska rabotilnitsa "Selishte" – Preslav. - *Slavia antiqua*, +VII, 1960, pp.393-415. Totev, T., St. Stanilov. Grajdanski postrojki na levija brjag na reka Ticha v Preslav. INMIII, V, pp. 56-76.



Bulgarian black clergy<sup>18</sup>. Separate monasteries turn not only into religious centers but also centers for social activities so that the ordinary people could gain moral and material values. In that respect the establishment of the monasteries as an element of the urban and social structure of the capital centers contribute to the further formation of Pliska and Veliki Preslav as religious, production and cultural centers.

From the already mentioned facts and data it could be concluded that the territorial-spatial characteristics were of great importance for the urban outlook of the medieval Bulgarian town. There was also a strong connection between the territorial characteristics of the town and the social-economic processes. There are other crucial factors which stimulated the economic development of the town and its urbanization: the concentration in the town space of military-administrative, economic, cultural, religious, trade and cultural activities. We should also mention here the central place of the two capitals and highly developed transport system north of the Danube, east to the Black sea ports and south to the narrows of Stara planina.

Practically, a number of essential changes are carried out in the town area and the surroundings concerning the extending, building and differentiation of the urban structures – these are important urban factors always in constant dynamic processes of developing. Undoubtedly, along with the architectural-urban renovation of the fortified town cores of the two capitals of the First Bulgarian Kingdom, production and economic structures of the urban economy are established and expended territorially. Practically that led not only to the absorption but also to the establishment of separate units in the urban space which gradually acquired different functions: political, economic, cultural and some others. The dynamics in their building and development, points the internal-political and economical state of the Bulgarian state and mainly of the first capital centers in the early period of their existence.

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<sup>18</sup> Vitlyanov, St. Za proizvodstvenija karakter na bulgarskite srednovekovni manastiri. – In: Medieval Christian Europe: East and West. Sofia 2002, pp. 713-719.